

The Doctrine of Spiritual Adoption

Westminster Confession of Faith: Chapter 12- Of Adoption

All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth, in and for His only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption, (Eph 1:5; Gal 4:4-5); by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God, (Rom 8:17; John 1:12); have His name put upon them, (Jer 14:9; 2Co 6:18; Rev 3:12); receive the spirit of adoption, (Rom 8:15); have access to the throne of grace with boldness, (Eph 3:12; Rom 5:2); are enabled to cry, Abba, Father, (Gal 4:6); are pitied, (Psalm 103:13); protected, (Pro 14:26); provided for, (Mat 6:30, 32; 1Pe 5:7); and chastened by Him, as by a Father, (Hbr 12:6): yet never cast off, (Lam 3:31); but sealed to the day of redemption, (Eph 4:30); and inherit the promises, (Hbr 6:12); as heirs of everlasting salvation, (1Pe 1:3-4; Heb 1:14).

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 74: What is adoption?

Answer: Adoption is an act of the free grace of God [1], in and for his only Son Jesus Christ [2], whereby all those that are justified are received into the number of his children [3], have his name put upon them [4], the Spirit of his Son given to them [5], are under his fatherly care and dispensations [6], admitted to all the liberties and privileges of the sons of God, made heirs of all the promises, and fellow heirs with Christ in glory. [7]

1. 1 John 3:1
2. Ephesians 1:5; Galatians 4:4-5
3. John 1:12;
4. 2 Corinthians 6:18; Revelation 3:12
5. Galatians 4:6
6. Psalm 103:13; Proverbs 14:26; Matthew 6:32
7. Hebrews 6:12; Romans 8:17

Westminster Shorter Catechism

Question 34: What is Adoption?

Answer: Adoption is an act of God's free grace¹, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the Sons of God².

1. 1 John 3:1
2. John 1:12; Romans 8:17

Simply Put Podcast Transcript (Barry Cooper)

Four weeks ago, I found myself in court. Don't worry; I hadn't been arrested for crimes against theology. This was a civic court, and I was there to witness something remarkable: two Christian friends finalizing the adoption of their dear little two-year-old boy. I expected it to be a happy occasion. What I wasn't quite ready for was just how emotional it turned out to be.

The adoptive parents were flanked on one side by the social worker and on the other by the judge. And as they held their little boy in their arms, the judge asked them these questions: "Do you take Henry to be your son? Will you be his Mom and Dad? And will you love him forever?" I looked sideways at my wife, Lee, and she too was doing a very bad job of pretending not to cry.

You see, we know these two people very well, and we know how humble, kind, and loving they are. So, we knew, even if little Henry didn't yet, that Henry has absolutely "lucked out." Because of that adoption, his life will be utterly transformed.

In a similar way, we as believers in Christ have been grafted into a family that is not ours by birth or by right. And similarly, the family that we've been grafted into isn't just any family. It's become a cliché to say "we're all God's children," but actually that is not the case. Though it's true that God showers many of His blessings universally, it's not true to say that He adopts everyone into his family. Not everyone can call themselves a child of God. And for the same reason, not everyone can call God their Father.

One scholar who studied Jewish antiquity has said that although there were extensive lists of titles you could use to address God in prayer, not one of those titles was Father. And yet if you look at the New Testament, you'll see that Jesus addressed God as Father in almost every prayer that He prayed. That's because He is the Son of God. And if we are adopted into Christ's family, we become sons and daughters of God too. So it's absolutely fitting for His disciples to address God in the way that Jesus teaches: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." How is it that we can be adopted into Christ's family?

John chapter 1 explains: "To all who [received] him, who believed in [Christ's] name, he gave the right to become children of God." The Apostle Paul never uses the word "Christian" in any of his letters. Instead, some 216 times, he describes believers as being "in the Lord" or "in Christ." That's because a Christian is someone who has been adopted into Christ, into a new family. And as result of that adoption, all that belongs to Christ is yours. His perfectly obedient life is yours. Christ's death, resurrection and ascension are yours—Paul says you were "crucified with Christ," "buried . . . with him," "raised with Christ," and you are spiritually "seated . . . with him in the heavenly realms."

Christ's inheritance, too, is yours. According to Romans chapter 8, you are now a joint heir with Him. That means you will inherit the new heaven and the new earth and the glory that belongs to Christ. The love that fills the eyes of the Father as He gazes at His Son is also yours, and that same love fills His eyes as He gazes at you. As Jesus says in [John 17:23](#), the Father has loved His people just as He has loved the Son.

In 1 John chapter 3, you can hear, even across the centuries, how overwhelming this reality of adoption is: "See what great love the Father has lavished on us," John says, "that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! . . . Dear friends, now we are children of God." Do you feel the wonder of that? If you are in Christ, then you have been adopted into His family. What our friends said to dear little Henry, almighty God says to you: I will take you to be My son, My daughter. I am your Father. And I will love you, forever